



Middle School Program

Years Six to Eight



Part 1: Program Rationale

What informed our thinking - learnings from US visits

In 2026 Cressida Batterham, Head of Campus - Arlington, Lewis Kingston, Asst. Head of Campus - Blackhall, and Aaron Mackinnon, Principal, participated in a study tour to the US of various progressive schools. This tour sat at a defined strategic moment for Preshil. The 2024 Educational Review set two interlocking directions: a redefined Middle School and a reimagined Senior Studio for Years 9–12. The subsequent strategic sale of Blackhall and purchase of Lincoln Square in Carlton, and the confirmation of our Middle Program at Arlington, sharpened both the strategy and the brief. With the future campuses for these programs now known, we were able to move beyond concept and into purposeful design.

We chose the United States — and within it the progressive metropolitan centres of New York City, Los Angeles, and San Francisco — because these cities host a concentration of mature progressive schools navigating the same tensions we are now stepping into: K–8 cohesion, middle years developmental complexity.

Schools Visited

The delegation visited eight progressive schools across three cities:

- New Roads School, Santa Monica
- Dalton School, New York
- Institute for Collaborative Education (ICE), New York
- Urban Academy, New York
- Studio School, New York
- The Little Red School, New York
- The San Francisco Schoolhouse, San Francisco
- The Bay School of San Francisco, San Francisco

These schools have sharpened and affirmed the emerging Middle School design, which has been in development throughout 2025 and 2026. There were three key elements at play in the most successful schools we visited which translate seamlessly to our context:

Homeroom - as the anchor for all students.

Projects - as the vehicle for self expression and skill acquisition.

Lab - as the ongoing thread between student and teacher as a one-to-one practice. This acts as a guide and challenge point within project learning.

Key consolidations arising from the tour include:

- A Year 6–8 Middle School model, confirming that the developmental window of early adolescence is best held across three years rather than compressed into two.
- Homeroom as the relational anchor: every Middle School student connected to a Homeroom teacher who holds their story and is the consistent point of contact for the family.

- A Personal Project Arc across all three Middle School years, with a signature project in Year 7, culminating in a Year 8 Reflective Practice presentation and a self-authored Letter of Introduction into Senior School.
- Lab as the ongoing one-to-one meetings between students and their teachers where projects, and their structure, content and goals, are talked through to support learning outcomes.
- An interdisciplinary instructional approach — across Maths/Science and English/Humanities — that gives staff and students a vocabulary of expansion not reduction within teaching and learning disciplines.
- Collaborative Themed Inquiries: twice-yearly whole-middle-school inquiry blocks, which may include Lincoln Square and the Carlton context as the classroom for these from 2028.
- Vertical Open-Age Academic Electives across Years 6–8, organised around shared interests.
- A coherent calendar of rites of passage and traditions.

Why these years matter — and what we do about it

Being aware of misguided starting points

We live in an age of unprecedented access to information. Entire bodies of knowledge sit only a click away. Artificial intelligence can generate and synthesise content faster than any human or teacher ever could. And yet many schools remain organised as if the acquisition of information is still a problem to solve.

It isn't.

The problem now is meaning. Critical thinking. Identity. Connection. Working alongside a young person whilst they grow in their understanding of who they are, what they care about, and how they participate in a world that is constantly shifting.

Curriculum alone cannot do that. And nowhere is the cost of getting this wrong more critical than in the middle years.

What's actually happening at this age

Second only to early childhood, ages 11 to 14 represent one of the most accelerated periods of human growth. The brain is reorganising. Peer relationships intensify. Self-concept begins to form.

“Young people at this age are, simultaneously, the oldest possible child and the youngest possible adult.”

Dan Vorenberg , Head of New Road School, California

This creates genuine tension, not a problem to fix, but a condition to design for. Young people navigating early adolescents still need safety, care, and relational grounding. But they are also reaching for autonomy, independence, and a sense of self. They want to be

guided and to push back against guidance. To belong and to stand apart. To be known and to remain a little unknowable.

We still develop in stages. We still learn through relationships. We still need to belong before we can become. Neuroscience has confirmed what good educators have long understood: being known, and feeling securely connected, is a precondition for any meaningful learning.

So that is where we begin.

What we do and why;

We start with the person, not the program. Every student in our Middle School is known, genuinely known, by a dedicated team of collaborative, deeply relational educators who work together around the broader community and the individual. Our intentionally small and intimate community makes this possible. Connection here is not an aspiration. It is a design principle.

We honour self-determination. Young people at this age have a developmental need for agency. We take that seriously. They can make real choices about their learning, pursue genuine interests, and are trusted with growing responsibility, not as a reward for compliance, but as a recognition of who they are becoming.

We protect the role of play. Early adolescence still craves play, adventure, and growing risk. This is not something to manage or minimise. It is something to celebrate. At Preshil, play is understood as a legitimate, multi-faceted and a vital mode of learning. It is woven into the fabric of our program accordingly.

We learn in and with nature. We are deeply attuned to the human need for connection with the natural world. Our middle schoolers will learn amongst trees, fresh air, sun, and rain. Biophilic connection is not a wellness add-on. It is central to how we think about learning with our environment.

We use technology sensibly. Technology is a tool and, like all tools, its value depends on whether it is the right one for the job. We make thoughtful, deliberate decisions about when and how technology supports learning, rather than allowing it to shape the culture of the classroom by default.

We invest in sustained inquiry. Project-based and inquiry-led learning runs across our entire Middle School program. Our project focus spans three years, with Year 6 engaging in structuring and undertaking two projects, with the signature Community Project in Year 7 incorporating real-world action and connection, which culminates in Year 8 with a public reflection.

Interdisciplinary inquiry assignments are embedded within all three years, and underpinned by dedicated one-to-one student-teacher Labs. And twice a year, our

two-week Middle School Collaborative Inquiries take learning beyond the classroom and into the world around us.

We practise the art of conversation. Socratic circles are a regular and valued part of our program, teaching children to think critically, listen carefully, and articulate their ideas with confidence and nuance. These are not academic exercises. They are the foundation of a thoughtful civic life.

We nurture natural leadership. As the oldest child on a Kindergarten to Year 8 campus, our middle schoolers occupy a natural leadership role and we design for it intentionally. Our Biggies and Buddies program builds genuine mentoring relationships that develop over multiple years, not just one. Children don't just practise leadership. They live it.

We give them space to be themselves. Middle school children need room to be rambunctious, to test ideas, to figure out who they are without an audience judging every move. We understand this. Our spaces and culture are designed to hold that freedom safely.

We take identity seriously. This is the age where personal and political identity begins to emerge. We don't shy away from that. We create conditions where young people can develop a confident, considered, and declared sense of self, not prescribed by us, but celebrated by us.

What we see at the end of it

The young people who leave our Middle School are not just academically prepared. They are refined, confident, and self-aware. They know what they think and why. They know how to work with others and how to stand alone. They have experienced genuine agency and they carry it with them.

Self-actualisation is not a word we use lightly. But it is what we see, again and again, in the young people who move through our school. We have designed the Middle School program around the young person, around who they actually are at this age; through this, something remarkable becomes possible.

Part 2: Program Structure

Our Team

The Middle School is led and held by the Middle School Team Leader in a close-knit collaborative team. This is a deliberate model; a group of educators who plan together, know each child together, and bring their combined expertise to bear on the learning and wellbeing of the whole community.

Middle School Team Leader

The Middle School Team Leader holds overall wellbeing and learning responsibility for the Middle School and provides leadership across the learning program. This is both a leadership and a teaching role. The Team Leader has their own Homeroom group and teaches across core areas alongside the broader team, remaining embedded in the daily life of the community they lead. They are the connective thread between the Middle School, specialist staff, and school leadership, and the primary point of escalation and support for Homeroom teachers in their care of children and families.

Homeroom Teachers

Additional Homeroom Teachers, each hold their own Homeroom group. As the primary point of contact for the children and their families, Homeroom teachers carry the relational heart of the program. They know their children deeply, communicate closely with families, and are supported in this responsibility by the Team Leader.

Each Core Teacher also brings a distinct area of subject expertise to the team. Working in close collaboration, the core team is well-placed to support the interdisciplinary nature of inquiry learning. When a project or investigation crosses subject boundaries, as the best ones tend to, children have immediate access to the expertise they need, held within a team that already knows them well.

The Middle School team is chosen for relational depth as much as subject knowledge. They are educators who know that being known is a precondition for learning, and who build their practice around that belief every day.

Learning Inclusion Leader - will have oversight of all Middle School IEPs and SSGs supportive of students with both social and emotional and / or academic needs, write and provide additional support programs for students, and select programs for staff professional development.

Specialist Teachers

Specialist Teachers bring nuanced, expert teaching to their disciplinary areas, including Health and Physical Education, World Languages (French , Art, Music, Drama, and Design. While they work with children in a more focused context, they are meaningfully connected to the broader team through regular allocated team meetings, ensuring their work is informed by and integrated with the wider program.

During our two-week Collaborative Themed Inquiries, Specialist Teachers play an expanded role, joining the full Middle School community in the field and contributing their expertise to the shared inquiry experience.

Community Experts

We envisage the Year 7 Community Project will require outreach to experts in the community; artists, athletes, scientists, entrepreneurs etc. We will be pulling on our parent population, and beyond, to step forward to share their expertise and enthusiasm

for their field, while the mentoring of this project is managed through Lab - the one-to-one mentor meetings which guide and support this project work.

Homeroom

Every child in our Middle School belongs to a Homeroom. This is an intimate group anchored by a teacher who knows them well. This is the relational heart of the program. A place of consistency, care, and daily rhythm. Homeroom time is genuinely fluid. Children might be in a Project Lab meeting, listening to a novel being read aloud, working through homework with support, or gathering as a group for conversation and reflection. The shape of the time responds to what the group needs.

Within Homeroom, several threads run consistently across the middle school years:

- **Buddy Program** — cross-age mentoring relationships that develop with intention and depth over time
- **Separates** — being read to remains a valued and nourishing experience at this age, and we make no apology for it
- **Group Meetings** — structured time for the group to gather, reflect, and navigate the shared life of the community
- **Tending** — care for the environment, the space, and each other
- **Personal Project Arc** — Our signature Personal Passion Project spans three years, culminating in Year 7 with real-world action and Year 8 public reflection.
- **Lab** — dedicated meeting for support with project, inquiry or core work
- **Clubs** - Student-run activities which arise through proposals and sign ups

Core Curriculum - Maths and Science, English and Humanities with Homeroom Teachers

Math and Science, English and Humanities are both core offerings within the Middle School, housed within each Homeroom group and taught by a dedicated specialist teacher for six hours each week. Our approach is grounded in the balance between individual learning at a students' learning edge, and collaborative work in which each student benefits from the perspectives and thought processes of their peers. We do not treat these as opposing approaches. We treat them as interconnected and mutually complementary to each other.

Direct Instruction

Maths and Science - Clear, structured teaching of core concepts and skills. Children know what they are learning and why. Individually, they are being pushed beyond their personal learning edge within a differentiated approach that supports the individual and collective growth of all learners. A balance of Individualised and group direct instruction plays a role here, providing computational skill building, application and personal stretch.

The Science learning space is flexible and multi-disciplinary, incorporating a dedicated practical/wet area to support regular hands-on scientific inquiry. Core equipment is readily accessible to enable experimentation as a routine part of learning.

English and Humanities - Selected literature texts, theatre scripts, and historical texts play a key role here, providing inspiration for associated skill building and knowledge development. A small library of class texts will evolve.

Inquiry Assignments

Maths and Science - Extended assignments that move from the skills and knowledge outward to the applied and abstract, asking children to apply mathematical and scientific understanding in meaningful ways. These assignments are co-created with our young people, who have genuine agency in how they navigate the work. Built-in one-on-one lab checkpoints with the teacher provide support at key stages, addressing executive functioning, surfacing "just-in-time" learning needs as they arise, and keeping each child moving forward with curiosity and growing adequacies. Scientific and mathematical reasoning, the processes of holding space to question, hypothesising and design thinking, are key to this learning, rather than simply studying outcomes.

English and Humanities - Extended assignments are co-created with our young people, who have genuine agency in how they navigate the work, and are designed to prompt children to wonder, critique, inquire and explore understanding in meaningful ways. Built-in one-on-one lab checkpoints with the teacher provide support at key stages, addressing executive functioning, surfacing "just-in-time" learning needs, and keeping each child moving forward in finding meaningful links between learned skills and purposeful applications. Critical and creative thinking, the process of perspective taking within historical and current contexts and self expressions as a journey towards self actualisation are key to this learning.

Group Problems - Maths Science

Once a week, the class takes on a shared problem together. This is student-led collaborative problem solving; messy, generative, and deliberately so.

Socratic circles - English / Humanities

These are a regular and valued part of our English and Humanities program, allowing young people to think critically, listen carefully, and articulate their ideas with confidence and nuance.

Specialist Subjects

Our Specialist program brings children into contact with expert teachers across a range of disciplines. Some subjects run for the entirety of Middle School, providing continuity and depth. Others rotate on a semester basis, broadening experience and exposure.

Subject	Duration	Grouping
Health & Physical Education	Year-long	Mixed 6 - 8
World Languages (French)	Year-long	Year Level
Art	Semester	Year Level
Music	Semester	Year Level
Drama	Semester	Year Level
Design	Semester	Year Level

Vertical Open-Age Academic Electives

Middle school children naturally crave connection beyond their immediate year level. Our Academic Elective program is built on genuine choice, expanding the social landscape and responding to the developmental appetite for a wider community. Students select from interest-based subjects that cut across year levels, bringing together young people of different ages around a shared passion or curiosity.

Between three to four electives run concurrently each semester, of which each child is enrolled to one, ensuring that at any given point in the program, children have a rich variety of options.

Current elective offerings include:

- Studio Art
- Photography
- Band
- Improvisation
- Architecture
- STEAM
- Philosophy
- Japanese

Elective offerings evolve over time in response to student interest and staff expertise.

Our Approach to Inquiry

Inquiry is not a single thing at Preshil. It is a disposition, one that we develop deliberately and progressively across the middle school years through three distinct applications.

Personal Project Arc

The most significant thread running through a young person's middle school experience is their Personal Project Arc. This is an individualised, multi-year inquiry that grows in complexity and ambition alongside the child. It is not a one-off assignment. It is a sustained relationship with a question, a craft, or a domain that matters to them personally.

The arc has a distinct shape, building skills and confidence in Year 6 through our “Mini” inquiries, deepening scope and community connection in Year 7 with the commencement of their Passion Project, and then culminating in Year 8 in a formal presentation and reflective practice that prepares children for senior school.

Year 6 — Scaled “Mini” Projects Grade 6s undertake two projects of a smaller scale, working within a structured framework that builds the foundations of sustained inquiry: managing timelines, organising their process, completing iterations, and meeting lab checkpoints. Stakes are intentionally lower at this stage. The emphasis is on building habits and confidence. External consultation is encouraged but not required. Children author their own Project Report for their semester report.

Year 7 — Community Project: Think Global, Act Local A major year-long project with a strong lead-in across Term One. The scope then expands significantly. Young people engage with an area of genuine personal interest and are expected to consult with an expert in their chosen field. This expert could be within or outside of the school. Lab checkpoints shift to include both internal tracking and external accountability. This is a leveling up undertaking, when compared to the work previously completed in Grade 6, and the young people are supported accordingly. Our Year 7s write two Project Reports across the year — one tracking progress, one at completion, both published in the Semester Reports

Year 8 — Reflective Practice The final year of the arc is less about producing something new and more about understanding what has been built. Our Year 8s present their major project formally and engage in structured reflective practice, looking back at their journey with honesty and insight. This culminates in a Letter of Introduction for Senior School: a considered, self-authored account of who they are as a learner and what they are ready for next.

Subject-Specific Inquiry

Woven into our core curriculum across all subject areas are sustained inquiry assignments; projects that run over several weeks and move young people from the

skills and knowledge, outward toward the applied and abstract. These can be individual or collective in nature, and are co-constructed with children to allow genuine agency in how they navigate the work. Built-in lab checkpoints ensure each child is supported at key moments, with one-on-one time with their teacher to address what they need, when they need it.

Collaborative Themed Inquiries

Twice each year, the full Middle School comes together for an intensive two-week Collaborative Inquiry. These are whole-community experiences, time-bound and purposeful, co-constructed with children around a shared theme or question. The outcomes are not predetermined. The inquiry lens is chosen with the children. What emerges is genuinely unknown at the outset. And that is precisely the point.

These inquiries are experiential and outward-facing, grounded in the real world immediately around us. They ask children to think together, work across year levels, and bring their individual strengths to a collective endeavour.

Subject specific projects will be within core subject learning blocks, with scaled mini projects and the community project being framed and supported within Homeroom times. For collaborative themed enquiries and projects, the timetable will shift to allow for extended times within the whole middle school cohort and within these enquiry weeks.

Middle School Camps

A camp program will be developed with the Middle Years team and students which takes into account the students' readiness for challenge, and what might work within the academic year, the curriculum, and the cohort.

Student Groupings

A significant shift from Primary to Middle School will be a move toward a single teacher to a Homeroom group, capped at 18. Children will graduate from the Sunroom, from a co-teaching model, to a capped class group of a single year level, with a single teacher.

Personalised Pathway Planning

Individual Personalised Pathway Planning meetings will take place at Arlington during Term 3 of the year prior to students moving into the Senior Studio at Lincoln Square. These meetings will occur as pull-out sessions involving students, parents/carers, and the Careers Counsellor.

As part of the process, students will bring the reflections and assessment work completed through the Personal Project arc and use these as a foundation for conversation and planning. Together, students, families, and staff will explore how each young person's passions, interests, strengths, and emerging aspirations may take shape within their personalised program and subject selections as part of a broader multi-year planning process.

The intent is to support every young person to enter the senior learning environment with a strong sense of direction, ownership, and grounding in their learning aspirations.

To support this process, an annual Information Evening and Subject Expo for current Year 8 students and new enrolments will be held at Lincoln Square prior to the commencement of the Personalised Pathway Planning meetings.

Example Timetables

Grade 6					
Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
08:30-09:00					
09:00-10:00	Humanities	Humanities	Humanities	Specialist	Humanities
10:00-11:00	Specialist	Humanities	Specialist	Specialist	Specialist
11:00-11:30					
11:30-12:30	Math/Sci	Math/Sci	Math/Sci	Electivies	Math/Sci
12:30-1:30	Math/Sci	Specialist	Specialist	Electivies	Specialist
1:30-2:30					
2:30-3:30	Homeroom	Homeroom	Clubs	Homeroom	Homeroom

Grade 7A					
Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
08:30-09:00					
09:00-10:00	Math/Sci	Math/Sci	Math/Sci	Specialist	Math/Sci
10:00-11:00	Specialist	Math/Sci	Specialist	Specialist	Specialist
11:00-11:30					
11:30-12:30	Humanities	Humanities	Humanities	Electivies	Humanities

12:30-1:30	Humanities	Specialist	Specialist	Electivies	Specialist
1:30-2:30					
2:30-3:30	Homeroom	Homeroom	Clubs	Homeroom	Homeroom
Grade 7B					
Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
08:30-09:00					
09:00-10:00	Math/Sci	Math/Sci	Math/Sci	Specialist	Math/Sci
10:00-11:00	Specialist	Math/Sci	Specialist	Specialist	Specialist
11:00-11:30					
11:30-12:30	Humanities	Humanities	Humanities	Electivies	Humanities
12:30-1:30	Humanities	Specialist	Specialist	Electivies	Specialist
1:30-2:30					
2:30-3:30	Homeroom	Homeroom	Clubs	Homeroom	Homeroom

Rites of Passage and Traditions

Life at Arlington is punctuated by a number of significant traditions and rites of passage, all of which will remain, and be further enhanced by the maturity and contribution of our Middle School students. How these are embraced and created anew is yet to be seen, but our children and young people will continue to embrace and own these rites, as they always have done.

Curtains

The stage curtains have always been an exemplar of the importance of leading the learning from behind. They stand as an example of the ability of young people to collaborate together, and work to a single outcome of their creation. The curtains have been the work of the Years 5 & 6, as the culmination of their time at Arlington.

Playmaking

The tradition of the 'Biggies' devising and presenting a play for the younger children will continue as a rite of passage. What evolves in terms of performances for the middle schoolers will likely rest within the English Humanities program.

Whole School Meetings

These will continue with Primary and Middle school holding smaller regular meetings to table times for whole school meetings where they come together as a campus community

Anthology

This important tradition will continue with middle schoolers well placed to potentially elevate up to provide workshops, scribing and support for our young writers and illustrators.

Doo Dah, Dah Doo, Summer Sol and Winter Solstice

All of these important community events will strengthen with the contribution of our middle schoolers and continue to be a shared campus endeavour.

Graduation from Primary School

This will develop across the 2027 year as the then Year Five children determine what makes sense for them as they move to Middle School. Like the best of our traditions, the children will devise and imprint their own take on what this means for them, and how we acknowledge their stepping up.

Graduation from Middle School

This will develop over the roll out of the Middle School, with our first graduation class devising a celebration for the close of the 2028 academic year. We envisage a celebration which will involve the whole of the campus, much like the Year 12 Valedictory preparations.

Biggies and Buddies

The scope for the current Biggies and Buddies program to grow and develop is an exciting proposition. Currently, this program involves just the Peppercorns and Lighthouse children, however, we envisage this as expanding.